

Acting Governor Acts

John Meyers

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California's quirky constitutional ban on gubernatorial travel played out again this morning... with the first significant natural disaster that has landed on John Garamendi's plate since his election last November to the state's #2 job.

Garamendi's title of "lieutenant governor" has been replaced for the last day or so with the title "acting governor," while Arnold Schwarzenegger is visiting France, Austria, and England. In fact, you'll notice I'm not even calling him "Governor Schwarzenegger," in deference to the California constitution.

It's right there in Article V, Section 10: "The Lieutenant Governor shall act as Governor during the impeachment, absence from the State, or other temporary disability of the Governor..."

And so Acting Governor Garamendi was called... to act... this morning in response to the still growing blaze that now threatens South Lake Tahoe. The fire, which has charred about 2,000 acres so far, is only a few miles from the city limits. At a news conference at the state Capitol, Garamendi signed a state of emergency order for El Dorado County.

Garamendi and emergency officials briefed citizen Schwarzenegger on the fire this morning by phone. And a spokesman said the non-acting-former-actor-governor is being kept up to date on an hourly basis as he meets with British Prime Minister Tony Blair and others across the pond.

Given that Schwarzenegger is in such close contact with his staffers, one might ask: why can't he just be governor regardless of where he is?

Several legislative attempts at removing the "absence from the state" clause of that constitutional sentence have fizzled in recent years, for a myriad of reasons. The last such attempt was pushed by Sen. Dave Cox (R-Fair Oaks); and in an ironic twist, Cox was a speaker at this morning's event with the acting governor-- because it's his senatorial district that includes South Lake Tahoe.

I even heard the good senator address Garamendi as "governor."